World Hunger:

Causes, Beneficiaries, Victims

by

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"Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere."

M. L. King

" . . . whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind (humankind), and do more essential service to his (her) country, than the whole race of politicians put together.

Jonathan Swift

"Truth resides in every human heart and one has to search for it there, and to be guided by truth as one sees it. But no one has a right to coerce others to act according to his (her) own view of truth."

Mahatma Gandhi

This writer cannot consider world hunger solely within the discipline of moral philosophy and its discussion of rights, privileges, allocations and distributed justice such as Tom L. Beauchamp's "The Right to Food" essay in Values in Conflict.

William Aiken states in "World Hunger and Foreign Aid: The Morality of Mass Starvation", compiled in the aforementioned book, that one of the perceived causes of world hunger is "population disease." He goes on to mention that " . . . the mere presence of poverty and starvation is not an automatic sign of overpopulation with its future disastrous consequences." One of his most enlightened observations is that: "Quite often the problem is not the amount of resources available to support the population, but the distribution of those resources. Repressive, exploitative, unjust, neocolonial socio-economic structures (often backed by Western economic and military interests) prevents any increase in population from being absorbed into the economy and thus gaining productive self-sufficiency." He also rightfully concludes that: "Giving direct food aid to the masses will not solve all their problems of suffering, misery and want. Direct aid cannot eliminate the causes of poverty and hunger."

In most dialogues or reports regarding overpopulation and hunger, seldom is it mentioned that indigenous peoples throughout the world, controlled their populations according to available food resources, natural disasters and factional wars - in pre-contact times. Since developed nations have missionized and colonized the undeveloped nations of the Third World, imposing their religious beliefs and value systems on the controlled cultures,

infanticide, abortion, indigenous means of contraception and family planning, traditional methods of cultivation and food items, have all been deemed illegal, immoral or ill-conceived. Value systems of long-standing traditions and cultures have been devalued, altered and in many instances obliterated. Aiken, more than Beauchamp explores the interconnectedness of hunger, politics, economics and injustice. While the former's view is less altruistic and broader than the latter's, it is the writer's opinion that Aiken's world view is limited. ✓

When discussing world hunger should we be speaking of rights - or basic needs? Rights conjure-up such basic ideals as right to life and liberty, which are considered as positive rights. Freedom from oppression, want and misery are negative rights. Let us return to basic needs. These are not merely physical needs but also that nebulous "quality of life" that no group has a right to define for any other.

Similarly, one culture should not impose its values upon other cultures. An example would be that our perceived cultural self-need of food, or a work/reward ethic should not be foisted on other peoples. Such values may well be anti-cultural due to the fact that different populations have different cultural and moral values. Food is a basic need.

Garrett Hardin Collins in the video, "Bread of Life" espouses the view of quality of life over quantity of life. Hardin ~~Collins~~ believes that food for starving is buying time not saving lives (as is harvesting neomorts, one might add). He and his followers are the neo-Malthusians who believe in letting the human surplus die. Utilitarianism in its highest form. ✓ Yes. ✗.

In the same video, a minister who heads a People-to-People group firmly believes that saving even one starving child underscores the basic moral principal of humanitarianism. He proposes a solution of religious and moral obligation to others. Disparate views from two countrymen.

How can we deign to impose our values on other peoples and nations, when we cannot effect a rapprochement of our own values? Our own cultural and moral values are in conflict within our own society, let alone the value conflicts with distant peoples. So often, we base our appraisals and decisions on issues of world-wide importance while wearing the blinders of no, or mis-, information and a narrow world view. Such seems to be the case when considering world hunger.

The immense outpouring of aid to famine-stricken regions of Africa in recent months shows a genuine concern about world hunger on the part of affluent nations. Yet because the causes of hunger are so poorly understood, that aid will have a negligible impact, particularly over the long term. Despite all the media exposure, or more likely because of it, many of the realities underlying starvation and severe malnutrition remain buried beneath a blanket of myths.

The myths permeate the thinking of most officials charged with reducing hunger. One major misconception is the tendency to look at the global food shortage solely in terms of grain. The 1979 report of President Jimmy Carter's Commission on World Hunger concluded, "The United States is still the 'breadbasket of the world,' providing over half the grain imported by other nations." Similarly, "The Global 2000 Report" published by the Council on Environmental

Quality and State Department, and the Brandt Commission's study, both from 1980, envisioned this solution to the problem: Industrial nations would produce a vast surplus of grain, which underdeveloped nations would import in increasing amounts.

Little wonder, then, that many Americans believe that developed countries - and particularly their own country - can feed the hungry of the world. The truth is quite different. In 1978, a representative year between periods of exceptional famine, most U.S. agricultural exports went to well-fed nations, not to those where malnutrition is pervasive. And for all the importance placed on breadbaskets, only one-fifth of the grain in international trade goes to less-developed countries.

Rather than the rich feeding the poor, the poor feed the rich. Although the net flow of grain is from the well-fed countries to the malnourished, that amount is a minute fraction of the total grain produced in the world. In sharp contrast, the flow of meat and fish, the major sources of protein, is in the opposite direction. As analyst Georg Borgstrom, author of many books on world hunger, has emphasized, "Protein deficiency . . . must be regarded as the chief nutritional deficiency in the world."

Anyone interested in understanding the causes of poverty and hunger should not look at the poor and hungry themselves, but at their relationship with the rest of society. Demonstrating that it is not just control over the physical assets of a national or international food system that counts but control over the way we think about them. Susan George in her book Ill Fares the Land, challenges us to look at the deeper meanings of the "transfer" of technology, of mainstream development scholarship and of societal

taste-making. The manipulation of scholarship, culture and ideology is not peripheral to, but at the center of our growing global food crisis. She also writes of the development models that generate the very hunger they claim to be alleviating.

The United States regularly imports much more meat than it exports; other prosperous countries, notably Japan, are rapidly increasing their imports, adding to the demand. In 1977, the United States exported about $600 million worth of meat but imported more than twice that amount, much of it from poor countries. Apologists often contend that the United States imports only a small fraction of the total amount of meat it consumes, but that is beside the point. It is said that three people in the Third World go to bed hungry every night so that one American can have a weight problem. Imported meat doesn't contribute much to that weight problem; nevertheless, imports by developed countries take food from the mouths of millions of people elsewhere in the world.

One to remember. Very well put.

What about protein harvested from the sea? As political scientist George Kent, a specialist in food resources, observes, "Fish continue to migrate after they are caught." Traveling from the more needy to the less needy. As a graphic illustration, Kent cites the fact that in 1971, when the previous great famine struck Africa, 56 million pounds of fish were exported from the hardest-hit regions. The United States is a major world consumer, importing even more fish than it does meat. Imported fish rose from less than 20% of the U.S. catch in the 1950's to more than 40% in the 1970's. Prior to 1950, practically all of the fish eaten in the North was also caught in northern waters. Today, between a third and a half comes from underdeveloped countries' seaspace. Very

little of this commercial catch serves the needs of populations in the southern hemisphere countries. Sad.

In the agribusiness international economic order there is every reason that American cats take precedence over West African people, since the former can pay and the latter frequently cannot. The population of the U.S. now stands at 225 million people, but the number of consumers is closer to 300 million, because one must take into account the 30 million cats and 35 million dogs who eat over two billion dollars worth of processed food annually. Cheaply produced meats and fish from the underdeveloped countries make up a good bit of their menus; dog and cat food are also among the most profitable items agribusiness has to sell and are therefore aggressively promoted. These facts are taken from the Commercial and Financial Chronicle, June 17, 1974 article "Ralston Purina Profits by Going to the Dogs." Good pt. Excellent source

The migration of meat and fish from protein-deficient to the protein-rich helps explain the changing pattern of food consumption and the growing inequities accompanying them. Throughout Central America, forests essential to the climatic and ecological stability of the region, and possibly the hemisphere, are being decimated so cattle can be raised on the cleared land. The beef winds-up not on the tables of the indigenous people but as hamburger in American fast food restaurants. Even the small island countries of Oceania, such as the Solomon Islands, do not escape the profit-hungry clutches of the multinational corporations. Their traditional lands are being lost to the world food system by the supplanting of traditional crops with cash crops such as cocoa, coconut, rice and palm oil.

Norman Myers, an expert on tropical forests, points out that

in Costa Rica between 1960 and 1980, "beef production almost quadrupled, yet . . . local consumption of beef actually declined by more than 40%." Guatemala and Honduras followed the same pattern. So did Nicaragua until 1979, when the Somoza dictatorship was overthrown. Under that plundering regime, beef production increased three-fold after 1960, but beef exports increased nearly six-fold. The Somoza family owned one-fourth of the country's farmland, as well as six beef-importing companies in Miami.

A variation on the same theme is played elsewhere in the world. Despite a substantial increase in the total catch in Malaysia from 1967 to 1975, per capita fish consumption dropped by 30%. In Thailand, the Philippines, and the Solomon Islands seafood exports have also increased rapidly while local consumption has declined.

World hunger is evident even among the affluent U.S. society. The aged and female-headed households of our country receive much less publicity and aid in their hunger than the starving peoples of African countries. Is this the result of triage, or the societal myth that hunger does not exist in America—only in underdeveloped countries where people are lazy, shiftless and valueless?

Excellent question, aesthetically phrased

According to Stallard, Ehrenreich and Sklar in Poverty and the American Dream: Women and Children First - "Children are dying because of cutbacks in U.S. social services. On January 23, 1983, CBS News did a report on the upsurge in low-weight births and infant mortality around the country, citing a study by the Washington-based Food Research and Action Center. The causes are cumulative: rising poverty and unemployment coupled with increasingly inadequate nutrition and preventitive health programs. The Women-Infant-Children Food Program (WIC) is a good example of the gap between need and

services. According to Dr. Bailus Walker, Director of Public Health for Michigan, the state's WIC program has enough money to serve 76,000 families, but another 30,000 need it. Michigan, a state devastated by auto layoffs, is seeing, says Dr. Walker, "one of the greatest year-to-year increases" in infant mortality "since World War II." The infant mortality rate of inner-city Detroit is higher than that of Honduras. / Shocking statistic

The poor and hungry of the world are but pawns in the hands of an elite cadre of politic ians whose primary interest is self-enrichment and aggrandisent rather than humanitarian and social concerns for their people. Sp.

In the U.S., millionaire politicians begrudgingly grant an ever decreasing number of eligible participants the magnanimous sum of 47¢ a meal in food stamps; while in Ethiopa demonical dictators prevent distribution of contributed grain to people who, though starving, might be opposed to their regime, while readily accepting and distributing shipments of armaments from nations more sympathetic to their political health than their people's nutritional health. Well put. Sp.

It is George's contention that agribusiness, controlled by multinational corporations, ultimately causes the problem of world hunger, without aiding in the solution or mitigating the situation. Agribusiness in its single-minded pursuit of profit has destroyed cultures, lands and countries. The eradication of poverty and hunger in the U.S. or abroad, has not been of overriding concern to such corporations and the industrialized countries.

The U.S. and the world is hostage to the investment decisions of multinational corporations which monopolize natural resources,

food systems and other life support resources.

Food is a powerful political tool. Food dependency conditions other kinds of dependency, and so long as a nation has failed to solve its own food problems, there is little chance that it can practice any truly independent policies, whether domestic or foreign. Such a tool is most effectively used by the Communists, first to lure, then to destabilize and finally to retain control of a populace such as Vietnam. Non-communist nations are no less guilty of such blackmail. The U.S. will proffer food to a starving country, if its leaders will align themselves politically with us; to amalgamate their ideologies regarding politics, population and values. Ideological obstacles often are a prominent bar to relief. Such was the case in Ethiopia, which has a Marxist government. It was not the government of the U.S. that initiated contributions of food and grain to that country, but the people of the U.S. themselves, who gathered and shipped donations.

In order to further understand the interconnectedness of world hunger with politics, economy, sociology and agribusiness, one must define food systems as opposed to agriculture. The latter was based on farms that were not vast stands of a single crop - they were complex operations involving both plants and animals - often several different kinds of both. In such polycultural operations, the farmer can be at least partially self-sufficient: seeds can be reproduced from crops (and exchanged with neighbors); animals provide much necessary fertilizer; pesticides are less necessary because the variety of plant species inhibits the spread of pests and disease; energy requirements may also be supplied on the spot when traction is provided by animals (fueled) with home-

grown fodder. Such a system still exists in most parts of Europe and is the foundation of Third World nations. Food systems can be best understood by imagining a line divided into three segments. The first segment is labeled "input", the second "food production", and the third "post-harvest"; or, if one prefers, "storage, processing and distribution." These three abstract categories apply to every human community (including those that don't farm - like Eskimos - if one replaces "harvest" with "catch") but their food systems will naturally vary enormously in length and complexity. The chain will be shortest in self-provisioning farming communities that rely on "natural" imports (rain, self-reproduced seeds, hard work) and that store the resulting harvest on the spot. In shortline food systems, processing is limited to grinding and cooking - mostly breads and porridges; the producers and the consumers are the same people. The line is without doubt longest in the United States where industry has taken over the provision of all the agricultural input (including rain, if one counts cloud seeding); where the farming community itself is just a tiny segment of the line; where the storage, processing and distribution are immensely sophisticated operations and cost two-thirds of every dollar spent on food. Incredible. Most academic research has focused on one or another of the division or subdivisions of the line (often on production alone) and has thus frequently not seen the forest for the trees. Unless one tries to place particular aspects of food systems in their total context (not an easy job precisely because of the lack of research) one is likely to miss what is actually taking place. And what is actually taking place has, in my opinion, sinister implications for under-developed countries.

Here are some hypotheses concerning food systems:

(1) There is a recognizable pattern in the evolution of the food systems of capitalist countries; among them the U.S. system is the one that has progressed furthest toward a high-technology type. This U.S. system is tantamount to a model or paradigm toward which other countries are moving. This model will therefore, over time, tend to become unique.

(2) There is a concentrated effort on the part of the agents of the capitalist world system ("agents" in the non-conspiratorial sense of those who act, produce and effect); largely, though not exclusively, multinational corporations, to introduce the food system model they have devised at home to the underdeveloped nations. This is not being done with the aim of making underdeveloped countries' food systems independent and viable, but rather in order to dominate them more effectively so that the "periphery" may better serve the needs of the "center." ✓ Well put.

(3) This model has no relevance, past or present, to the needs and realities of Third World societies, since it evolved in the developed world under radically different circumstances. Indeed, it will be (and already is) enormously harmful to them, in particular because it perpetuates and reinforces hunger and malnutrition; still it is being accepted and put into practice with enthusiasm. ✓

The fact that this model is both offered and accepted with such enthusiasm is doubtless due to the class interests, both in the industrialized and the Third World countries, that the model serves. Third World leaders may sometimes adopt development theories and "solutions" which they perceive as being fashionable in the West and which they erroneously equate with the notion of "agricultural

progress" or "modernization."

Because the poor are feeding the rich, famine in many parts of the world will increase. Ironically, the conventional strategy of development agencies and many Third World governments - to encourage still greater exports - only makes matters worse. In the throes of its current misery, Africa offers a striking illustration. Media accounts portray the continent's food problem as a blend of drought, disease, overpopulation, political instability and inefficient peasant farming. The prevailing belief is that Africa is a basket case which will survive only through massive, open-ended aid. In fact, it is a rich and steady source of crops consumed daily in the advanced nations - meat, vegetables, tea, coffee, cocoa, sugar - and even of fresh flowers for the dinner table. Increased exports will profit international agribusiness, which dominates Third World agricultural production, and will maintain the large landholders there, but it won't feed hungry Africans.

Very well argued

A more promising strategy frequently advocated by those sincerely concerned about world hunger is agricultural self-sufficiency. But in its usual form, that doctrine is also flawed; self-sufficiency in less-developed countries can't happen until it is practiced by the developed nations and they relinquish their control of the world food system. Once that is understood, steps can be taken toward a policy to end pandemic hunger in the world.

Frances Moore Lappé, author of Diet for a Small Planet, pointed out a decade ago that world hunger grows steadily worse because people who want to solve the problem ask the wrong questions. They divert attention from the entrenched interests that profit more from continuation of the problem than from its solution.

The question, "What can poor countries do to become self-sufficient?" requires a small, but critical change to, "What can rich countries do to become self-sufficient?"

While Aiken proposes the encouragement of population control in impoverished nations " . . . through incentive of substantial and effective developmental assistance," as a means of reducing world hunger, this writer must disagree.

Actually, one can read in George's books, Feeding the Few, Food for Beginners, and How the Other Half Dies, that the guiding principle of an integrated world food system is not production for human need, but for "the market." By placing issues concerning food and agricultural commodities in the context of changing world economic relationships, George demonstrates the bond between agribusiness and Third World hunger. Refuting over-population, climate and inefficient farming as reasons for Third World hunger, George exposes the ruthless enterprise of multinational agribusiness, the methods of Neo-Malthusianism and neo-colonialism and the ravages of "aid" programs.

My worldview is more in alignment with George and Lappé. As long as multinational corporations, who are in collusion with the governments of industrialized countries, continue to expand the dismal failure known as the Green Revolution and ensnare the Third World nations into supplying the food systems of the North and catering to the North's lifestyle, while precipitating themselves into bankruptcy and their peoples into starvation, world hunger and injustice will reign despite the protestations of the philosophers and the actions of the humanitarians.

Rather than remaking indigenous agrarian cultures in the image

of the West, we must design approaches that integrate Western technology with traditional wisdom. Only then can we make progress toward ending world hunger.

No single discipline will effect the eradication of world hunger like no single national will bring about world peace. The peoples of the world must first regard themselves as part of a worldwide community of humans - with each human as valued as the next and with each human free to enjoy life and the pursuit of happiness without being manipulated, coerced and without having one peoples' values imposed upon another culture.

The causes have been stated, the beneficiaries are the multinational corporations and the banks who have developed agribusiness, and the victims are the poor peoples of the U.S. and the world.

Powerful & effective indictment of the present multi-national corporate policies which have both caused & aggravated the present world food crisis. Excellent sources. A superior, articulate & insightfully radical analysis of the problem of world hunger. A few of your sentences will remain acidly etched in my memory.

Workshop Grade = 4.0.

198/200.